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ABSTRACT

Placed within the context of current policy, research, and implementation provisions in early childhood education in New Zealand, this study examined the current professional development provisions for the implementation of Te Whariki in Pacific Islands early childhood centers (PIECCs) and the current approaches used by PIECCs to assess children's learning and to evaluate Te Whariki implementation. The study further identified important criteria for selecting centers, elements, and processes for inclusion in an action research project to evaluate the implementation of Te Whariki. Data were collected through focus group interviews. Participants included representatives from a range of PIECCs (staff and management) and those involved in professional development in implementing Te Whariki in PIECCs. The findings indicated that staff and management of most centers felt confident in planning and implementing Te Whariki strands; a particular challenge was implementing Te Whariki using their own Pacific languages and cultural values. The facilitators of professional development reported that Te Whariki is in place, with centers differing in level of implementation. Facilitators referred to the language issue and the importance of translating Te Whariki to make the professional development task easier. All centers included daily individual observations of children as their main method for gathering assessment information. Translating terms and concepts remains a challenge for more fully involving parents in assessment and evaluation. Continuing concerns include meeting current requirements, using the appropriate language, and having sufficient time for professional development. (Appended is a sample focus group agenda and a list of participating Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centers. Contains 30 references.) (KB)

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IMPLEMENTATION OF TE WHĀRIKI IN PACIFIC ISLANDS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

FINAL REPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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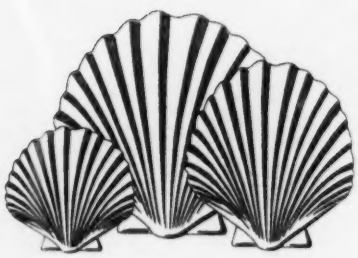

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FINAL REPORT TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

DIANE MARA

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Wellington
1999

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY v
- Implementation of Te Whāriki v
- Current Professional Development Provision vi
- Assessment and Evaluation Approaches vi
- Continuing Issues and Concerns vi
- Development of a Proposed Action Research Project in PIECCs vii
- Feedback from the Project Advisory Committee vii
- Discussion viii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

INTRODUCTION 1
- Rationale 1
  - Pacific Islands Early Childhood Research Fono 1
  - Anau Ako Pasifika Conference 1
  - Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki 2
- Research, Policy, and Implementation Context 3
- Aims of the Project 4
- Research Questions 5

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 7
- Research Design 7
- Focus Group Sample/Participants 7
- Focus Group Interview Questions 9
- Participation and Procedures 9
- Recording of Feedback from Participants 9
- Qualitative Data Analyses 10

RESULTS 11
- Description of Te Whāriki in Action 11
- Implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs 11
  - Planning 11
  - Implementation of the Strands 12
  - Pacific Islands Languages and Te Whāriki 13
  - Involvement of Parents 14
- Professional Development 15
  - Descriptive Outline of Professional Development 16
    - The Main Provider 16
    - Other Providers 16
  - Experiences of Provision 17
    - Comments from the Professional Development Personnel 17

Comments from Centres 18
Te Whāriki and the Implementation of *Ta'ala mo le Gagana Samoa* 19
Assessing Children's Learning and Evaluating Centres 20
Observing Individual Children 20
Working with Parents and the Community on Assessment and Evaluation 21
Assessing and Evaluating According to the Strands of Te Whāriki 22
Issues and Challenges Now and in the Future 23
Developing a Proposal for Action Research in PIECCs on Assessment and Evaluation Using Te Whāriki 23
Outline of the Learning and Teaching Stories Project 24
Responses from the Focus Groups 25
The Proposed Research Sample 25
Proposed Characteristics of the Co-ordinators-Researchers 25
Proposed Methodology 26
Outcomes and Dissemination of Results from a Proposed Study 27
Further Consultation 27
Utu Lelei (the Tongan National Early Childhood Association) 28
Te Punanga o te Reo Kuki Airani 28
Sosaiete Ā'oga 'Āmata Samoa i Aotearoa Inc 28
Kautaha Aoga Niue 28

DISCUSSION 31
Context 31
Professional Development in PIECCs for the Implementation of Te Whāriki 32
Implementing Te Whāriki 34
The Relationship Between Professional Development and Action Research 35
Future Training and Professional Development Provision 36
Future Research and a Proposed Action Research Phase in PIECCs 36
Continuing Issues 37

SUMMARY 39

REFERENCES 41

APPENDIX I 43
Focus Group Agenda (sample) 43

APPENDIX II 45
List of Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres Participating in the Focus Groups 45

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The impetus and support for this study came from a number of different sources including: the *Pacific Islands early childhood research fono (seminar)* hosted by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research in August 1997 that identified research priorities for the sector; the *Anau Ako Pasifika Conference: Moving into Many Futures* held in September 1997; and the project *Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki* (Podmore & May, with Mara 1998) which signalled the need for a parallel study for Pacific Islands early childhood centres (PIECCs).

This study is placed within the wider context of current policy, research, and implementation provisions in early childhood education in New Zealand. It also comes within the Ministry of Education's plan to promote Pacific Islands people's success in New Zealand education: *Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika* (Ministry of Education, 1996b).

Three research questions were posed.

(1) What are the current professional development provisions for the implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs?

(2) What current approaches are the PIECCs employing in the assessment of children's learning and the evaluation of their centres in the implementation of Te Whāriki?

(3) What would be the important criteria for selection of centres, elements, and processes to include in an action research project for PIECCs in the evaluation of the implementation of Te Whāriki?

Data were collected through the use of focus group interviews. Participants included representatives from a range of PIECCs (both staff and management), and those involved in professional development in the implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs. The main findings from the focus group discussions held in Wellington, Hamilton, Auckland, and Christchurch are collated under the following:

- how PIECCs are currently implementing Te Whāriki;
- the experiences of current provisions of professional development;
- the approaches PIECCs are currently using in assessing children's learning and evaluating centres;
- issues and challenges for PIECCs; and
- suggestions for the development of a proposed action research project.

Implementation of Te Whāriki

Representatives from most centres feel confident in planning and implementing the strands of Te Whāriki, with initial emphasis being placed on the strands: *Wellbeing*, *Contribution*, and *Belonging*. A particular challenge for all PIECCs is the implementation of Te Whāriki using their own Pacific languages and cultural values. Most informants agreed that PIECCs must use their own language (be it Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, or the Niue language) for the headings, terms, and concepts of Te Whāriki. All representatives mentioned the involvement of parents, caregivers, and the community as an important aspect of implementing the principles of Te Whāriki. Centres in each focus group produced a great deal of information about how they are working to achieve positive, inclusive relationships with their families.

Current Professional Development Provision

Generally, the facilitators of professional development report that Te Whāriki is "in place" and being implemented, although different centres are at different levels of development. They all note a growing confidence and familiarity with the early childhood curriculum. Facilitators referred to the issue of languages and the importance of translations of Te Whāriki. Where translations had been made, their professional development task in PIECCs was much easier. Early Childhood Development (ECD) staff who were delivering professional development welcomed the opportunity to expand their work and consolidate the work they had already begun in previous years.

Staff in centres reported high levels of satisfaction with the help and support that they are receiving from ECD. However, they said that 20 hours per year is not really enough time to spend with facilitators assigned to each centre. Their inability to get relievers to release staff for professional development is a continuing frustration. One representative reported very favourably on the needs-analysis approach used by the ECD facilitator as a starting point in the provision of professional development that would meet the centre's identified needs and priorities.

The facilitator for the *Ta'iala* (Samoan in the New Zealand Curriculum contract) from the Wellington College of Education reports how the teachers in ā'oga 'āmata (Samoan centres) involved in the contract have become much more skilled in action research and in identifying their own professional development needs.

Assessment and Evaluation Approaches

Representatives from different centres reported different approaches, but essentially all included daily individual observations of children as their main method for gathering assessment data. A number of representatives described how they are working with parents and involving them more in assessment and evaluation. Again, translation and interpreting terms and concepts (for example, into a Samoan context) are challenges for centre staff. Centre staff reported that their Pacific parents show a high level of protectiveness towards their children. The staff are required therefore to support parents in encouraging participation in learning experiences that are consistent with the strands of Te Whāriki. Centre staff were able to articulate what they do and why they do it, when assessing and evaluating. Further centre-based research might reveal more specifically how centres and staff are actually achieving learning outcomes for their children.

Continuing Issues and Concerns

These include meeting current requirements and regulations in relation to documentation, and using the appropriate language required for compliance. PIECCs with "mixed" Pacific populations have particular decisions to make regarding their programmes. Having access to sufficient time for professional development, including release time, is a continuing issue for centres which operate all day. Further concerns expressed by centre staff included parents' limited ability to raise funds, contribute materially, or pay fees to the centre; helping parents to understand Te Whāriki and the reasons why staff plan particular experiences and opportunities for their children; and involving parents in learning, teaching, and assessment procedures.

Ā'oga 'āmata are concurrently implementing Te Whāriki and *Ta'iala* (Samoan in the New Zealand Curriculum). Staff from these centres reported initial difficulties with attempting to implement both, until links were found between the two documents through the strand *Communication*. Other continuing concerns included having appropriate resources available to assist in implementing bilingual and immersion programmes, and providing support to unlicensed centres. Transition-to-school policies and practices in terms of assessment are also continuing issues for PIECCs.

Development of a Proposed Action Research Project in PIECCs

The links between the two research projects *Learning and Teaching Stories: An Approach to Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood* and *Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki* and this study were outlined in the focus groups by the researchers May, Carr, and Podmore. Their presentations set the scene for the focus group responses to a proposal for an action research project in PIECCs.

Suggestions from focus groups for a possible action research project centred on:

- the need for the research sample to be representative of all Pacific Islands centres;
- the co-ordinators-researchers to be skilled in a number of areas including fluency in the language of the centre, having a thorough knowledge of Te Whāriki, and, most importantly, possessing qualifications and experience as an early childhood educator.

Centre representatives reported that any research should:

- result in staff becoming more skilled in action research methods,
- be accepting of a range of ways of recording,
- make clear its expectations of the staff and parents, and
- take an holistic approach across all five strands of Te Whāriki.

Focus groups were also clear that the outcomes of any action research must benefit the children. The list of preferred outcomes included:

- promotion of the professional development of staff, by centre management,
- "developing our professionalism as reflective practitioners",
- enhancing accountability to all stakeholders, and
- producing case studies and a range of assessment and evaluation models from which centres could choose.

Feedback from the Project Advisory Committee

The issues that emerged from the focus groups were largely confirmed by the project advisory committee (representing the main national Pacific Islands early childhood organisations), including the nature and duration of professional development, and the issues of language and the translations of Te Whāriki.

The project advisory committee outlined issues that still require attention for the effective implementation of Te Whāriki and for future research. These include consideration of the resource implications for PIECCs to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of their children, establishment of a firmer theoretical base for Te Whāriki that translates to the aims and philosophies of PIECCs, and more action research on learning to develop a "Pacific" pedagogy.

Finally, there is a need for more in-depth research on the kinds of professional development provision for PIECCs that will enhance practice in these centres.

Discussion

The information provided through the focus groups, the advisory committee, and a review of relevant literature is brought together. The importance of the relationship between professional development provision and action research is demonstrated, together with the role of both in improving practice and programmes. On the basis of an analysis and synthesis of the literature, and the data from the focus groups, suggestions have been made for future training and future research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank all the members of focus groups and centre management which allowed time for staff to contribute in this way. The data collected through their participation have greatly informed this report.

Particular appreciation is extended to the staff of Early Childhood Development: Ta'ita'i Pasifika and Pacific Islands facilitators and co-ordinators in Auckland, Wellington, Hamilton, and Christchurch for their attendance at, and support to, centres attending, the focus groups, for their assistance in developing the sample of centres so it could be representative, and their invaluable contributions to discussions.

Our consultants Professor Helen May from the Institute of Early Childhood Studies and Dr Margaret Carr from Waikato University gave a background to the development of Te Whāriki and outlined subsequent research. This was very much appreciated by the members of the focus groups each consultant attended. The information shared focused the group discussions and set them within a wider early childhood education context.

Thanks are due to the members of the advisory committee to this project who shared their collective wisdom and experience to improve the final drafting of this report to record the important issues facing Pacific Islands early childhood education in New Zealand in implementing Te Whāriki.

The following provided venues for and hosted the various focus groups in their area: Pacific Islands Educational Resource Centre (South Auckland), the Auckland College of Education (Central and West Auckland), and Early Childhood Development (Christchurch). We thank them for their hospitality and kindness to the focus group members.

Dr Val Podmore from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) acted as a consultant to the project. She assisted with the collection of data in the focus groups, data analysis, and final writing and editing of the report, and her support in all these roles was invaluable. Three further members of NZCER staff also assisted: Lia Mapa acted very ably as research assistant on the project; Roberta Tiatia was responsible for word processing and formatting of the report; and Fay Swann for final editing. Thanks to you all.

Lastly, we acknowledge the Ministry of Education for funding this research project.

Fa'afetai lava! Fakaaue lahi! Meitaki ma'ata! Malo 'aupito! Maururu! Kia ora koutou katoa!

INTRODUCTION

Rationale

The impetus for this project came from a number of different sources and it is important that each of these is described since they form an important background to this project.

Pacific Islands Early Childhood Research Fono

First, in August 1997 the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) hosted a Pacific Islands early childhood research fono (seminar) in Wellington to identify research priorities for the sector. One of the priority areas identified concerned the implementation of Te Whāriki, the Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum document. Participants were asked for their feedback on the need for a study of Te Whāriki in Pacific Islands early childhood centres (PIECCs). They were asked if assessment and evaluation in relation to Te Whāriki could be investigated in two separate studies as had occurred in parallel work completed by Carr (1998) and Podmore and May, with Mara (1998). The alternative option was an action research study which would integrate both assessment and evaluation as in the current research by Carr, May, and Podmore (work in progress, 1998b). NZCER researchers were given clear guidelines that:

- any study should operate in parallel to the work done in playcentres, kindergartens, and childcare provisions;
- such a study could find out what is currently being taught in the centres, how Te Whāriki has already been implemented, and how the curriculum framework is being interpreted;
- such research must assist centres to meet their needs including assistance in establishing and licensing PIECCs.

Further, those attending the seminar recommended that both assessment and evaluation needed to be considered together, and that such a study should investigate whether there are shared understandings about Te Whāriki. They also advised that it was important to gather information about how Te Whāriki is being implemented across all PIECCs before any further research could take place, and that research include those centres not yet licensed (but working towards it) as well as those centres which are already licensed. Preference for a self-evaluative approach, and ongoing consultation with parents, was expressed. In terms of methodology, those attending the fono emphasised the need for researchers to observe appropriate protocols when entering any centre for observation and research. Most importantly, as with all Pacific Islands research, it must be beneficial to the communities, parents, families, and children involved otherwise it should not be carried out.

These comments, recorded at the August seminar, were used in the development of the rationale for the research proposal to the Ministry of Education.

Anau Ako Pasifika Conference

The second source of support for an examination of Te Whāriki in PIECCs was the Anau Ako Pasifika Conference, *Moving into Many Futures*, which was held in Tokoroa from the 25th to the

27th of September 1997. Invited participants included not only representatives from all the main agencies involved in Pacific Islands early childhood education, but also national organisations, training providers, and home-based educators.

One of the conference's stated aims was to respond to "the need for and availability of early childhood education resources which can be used to successfully implement a distinctive Pacific Islands early childhood curriculum" (Conference Programme, 1997). As part of that particular aspect of the conference, a paper was presented called "Te Whāriki: Assessment, Evaluation, and Research" (Mara, 1997).

During the presentation itself, and in subsequent discussions, a number of issues were raised by the conference participants.

- The variability of access by Pacific Islands early childhood centres to professional support—only ten centres in Auckland in 1997 received support in a trial project and no feedback emerged from it; there had been no—or very little—professional development outside Auckland (as at September 1997).
- Professional support that was provided was not targeted or focused on Pacific centres/languages/cultural needs and was not delivered by Pacific Islands people.
- The limited amount of resources provided by the Ministry of Education to ensure full implementation of the framework. (This was expressed prior to the publication of *Quality in Action/Te Mahi Whai Hua* (Ministry of Education, 1998c) and prior to the full implementation of Ministry of Education curriculum professional development contracts.)
- The lack of support for unlicensed centres that are working towards licensing.
- The lack of co-ordination of existing resources and continuity of provision.

In the final conference recommendations, there was unanimous support for research to find out what was happening in PIECCs in the implementation of Te Whāriki.

Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki

The third source of support for this project arose from the fact that the researcher developing the Pacific Islands proposal had been involved in the first phase of Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki (Podmore & May, with Mara 1998). This project was carried out in playcentres, kindergartens, and childcare centres but not in Pacific Islands early childhood centres (PIECCs) because it was felt by the initial proposers that the study needed a researcher with the appropriate background experience. The methodology used in the exploratory study, namely, the use of focus groups in Wellington, Auckland, and Dunedin, had been found to be a very successful way of directing researchers' focus for a subsequent ethnographic study in the centres. The exploratory study also built upon the work of Margaret Carr in the area of assessment using Te Whāriki, and this fitted well with the recommendation from the NZCER fono that any research in PIECCs should include both assessment and evaluation together.

As the subsequent phases of the exploratory study proceeded, other aspects of a process that may possibly assist in a "parallel" project in PIECCs emerged. Methods used in the exploratory study included informing and updating participants in the focus groups and maintaining close links with those currently providing professional development for PIECCs in the implementation of Te Whāriki.

Research, Policy, and Implementation Context

At the time this project was developed, several relevant research, policy, and implementation initiatives were in progress. The policy context of this study includes:

- *Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika* (Ministry of Education, 1996b), a plan to promote Pacific Islands people's success in New Zealand education goals for all sectors: "the most critical being early childhood education". One stated goal of *Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika* specifically relevant to this project is to—

> . . . identify initiatives and propose a long-term Pacific Islands early childhood education development plan, promoting quality, child health and welfare, ongoing support for early childhood centres, and the resourcing and strengthening of curriculum and management practices. (Smith, 1998, p. 1).

Support for the implementation of Te Whāriki includes:

- Professional development contracts finalised prior to the commencement of this project. One of the four areas of professional development contracted by the Ministry of Education is "programmes which support early childhood education services" (*The Education Gazette*, 21 September 1998, p. 15). The objective of several contracts relevant to the Pacific Islands early childhood centres is:

> To provide a professional development programme to assist early childhood educators and management to effectively implement *Te Whāriki* and the revised DOPs [Desirable Objectives and Practices] and also provide general professional support. (*The Education Gazette*, 1998, p. 16).

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is contracted to provide professional development programmes to "Pacific centres as well as mainstream centres with a high proportion of Pacific children (He Kete Pasifika)" (Smith, 1998, p. 2).

- *Samoan in the New Zealand Curriculum (Ta'iala mo le Gagana Samoa i Niu Sila)* is a curriculum statement which was published by the Ministry of Education (1996a). It outlines the learning and teaching of the Samoan language from early childhood through to the end of secondary school. It was developed in line with both Te Whāriki (including an early childhood level for learning and teaching Samoan), and with the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (including eight levels of achievement for learning and teaching Samoan in schools). Subsequent Ministry of Education professional development contracts in Auckland and Wellington have assisted in the implementation of the *Ta'iala* in ā'oga 'āmata (Samoan early childhood centres).

- *Quality in Action/Te Mahi Whai Hua*, a document contracted by the Ministry of Education (1998c), is also designed to support the implementation of policy, specifically, the revised Desirable Objectives and Practices (or DOPs), in which *Te Whāriki*—

> . . . is endorsed as an example of a quality curriculum . . . The curriculum that each early childhood service develops must be consistent with *Te Whāriki*. (p. 40)

Several **research** studies were influential, notably:

- The *Project for Assessing Children's Experiences*, co-ordinated by Margaret Carr, and funded by the Ministry of Education. This project, guided by the principles of Te Whāriki, developed and trialled a framework for assessment. The framework established, "Learning Stories", is holistic and designed to empower learners, and to communicate with families (Carr, 1998). A video package was later developed for practitioners.
- *Quality Evaluation of Early Childhood Programmes*, a review highlighting the key issues in evaluation by Cubey and Dalli (1996), published by the Institute for Early Childhood Studies, with support from the Sixth Early Childhood Convention.
- *Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki* (Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998), a report published on phases one and two of research funded by the Ministry of Education. This study aimed to develop a cohesive framework for evaluating the implementation of Te Whāriki by early childhood centres. Consultative focus groups and ethnographic observations of centres led to the development of a preliminary framework for self-evaluation ("Teaching Stories").

This Pacific Islands early childhood research project, designed as a parallel study to *Evaluating Early Childhood Programmes Using Te Whāriki* (Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998), shares with it some important features. The rationale for this project was developed within a context of greater accountability of all early childhood programmes in terms of effective practice and quality provision. The final version of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1996c) contains explicit outcomes for children and expectations of programmes, evaluation, and assessment. The uniqueness of Te Whāriki internationally, and the need to develop local models to encompass a diverse educational sector, remain a challenge.

In its October newsletter, *Pitopito Korero*, the Ministry of Education (1998b) restates its policy in relation to the attainment of quality and participation in all early childhood services. The links that exist between research and policy development are described. Research reports such as this, and those described previously, inform the Ministry's policy development in early childhood education and, in particular, curriculum implementation.

Aims of the Project

This project aimed:

- To describe the current levels of coverage and access to professional development provisions and support to PIECCs in implementing Te Whāriki.
- To plan a subsequent action research project for PIECCs that will develop an assessment and evaluation framework using the strands and goals of Te Whāriki, building upon the work of the 1997 studies in kindergartens, playcentres, and childcare centres (Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998).

Research Questions

Taking into account the diversity of centres—ethnically, geographically, and the stages they have reached in the progress towards licensing and chartering—this study set out to answer three questions.

(1) What are the current professional development provisions for the implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs?

(2) What current approaches are staff at the PIECCs employing in the assessment of children's learning and the evaluation of their centres in the implementation of Te Whāriki?

(3) What are the important criteria for selection of centres, elements, and processes to include in an action research project for PIECCs in the evaluation of the implementation of Te Whāriki?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The methodological procedure of focus groups was used to collect the information required to answer the research questions (Krueger, 1988; Tamasese, Peteru, & Waldegrave, 1997; Watts & Ebbutt, 1987; Wilson, 1997). The research by Tamasese et al. in surveying the mental health needs of Samoan communities in New Zealand confirms the use of this approach as being appropriate for Pacific informants. The focus groups in the study by Tamasese et al. (1997) were run using the Samoan language, the status of all participants was recognised and provided for, and an exchange of information occurred between researchers and participants on mental health issues.

The format of the focus groups in the present study was consistent across the six focus groups which were held in Wellington (19 June); Porirua (8 July); Hamilton (9 July); Auckland Central (29 July); South Auckland (30 July); and Christchurch, including Invercargill and Dunedin (6 August).

A sample agenda (in appendix I) was the programme for all of the six focus groups. A prayer opened and closed all groups. After initial introductions the rationale behind focus group methodology was explained by the researcher. These included an opportunity for those engaged in similar tasks or activities to share their experiences, the opportunity to gain new knowledge or insight in their shared field of interest, and the opportunity to plan for a project which had the potential to benefit not only themselves but also those they represented.

Participants were informed of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's ethical statement, which guarantees them confidentiality and ethical standards and practices by its researchers. Those taking part in the focus groups were given the opportunity to withdraw or the choice to respond and the power to request that responses not be recorded. In all groups suggestions for the action research phase were written on a whiteboard so the group could approve what was then recorded. All groups were facilitated by two people so that note-taking and presentation were shared. Notes of all focus groups were sent to the participants in each group for comment, alteration, or addition to ensure accuracy.

Focus Group Sample/Participants

Participants of the focus groups were chosen using the following approaches. PIECCs that are licensed and chartered are—

> . . . required to implement policies and practices which reflect legislative requirements and to build on the regulations to include the additional requirements set out in the Revised Statement of Desirable Practices and Objectives, 1996 (which came into effect in August 1998). (Ministry of Education, June 1998b, p. 5)

Therefore the selection of the research sample was limited from the outset to representatives from licensed and chartered centres or those close to licensing and chartering, since they would have to be implementing Te Whāriki and the Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs).

Second, it was important from the outset to include the professional development providers, which in the case of PIECCs was Early Childhood Development. ECD has a contract with the Ministry of Education for 1998 and 1999 to work with thirty-three centres nationally, i.e., 90 percent of all PIECCs. A small number of PIECCs are working with other providers. The Wellington focus group also included the contract co-ordinator of the Wellington College of Education for the delivery of the *Ta'iala* in ā'oga 'āmata in the Wellington region (*see* p. 3 for the definition of the *Ta'iala* document).

From the Ministry of Education's list of licensed centres (as at 22 May 1998) and the information on centres supplied by ECD's Ta'ita'i Pasifika (Salā Edna Faleto'ese), letters of invitation were sent out to centres requesting them to send representatives to a series of focus groups. The intention was to invite representatives of all the ethnic groups which had licensed centres in each region. In all places but one (Auckland), all centres (the entire number of PIECCs in that area) were able to be included. The researchers are indebted to the ECD staff in the Auckland area for selecting the centres on a representative basis so that all ethnic groups were invited to these two focus groups.

Commencing in June 1998, letters were sent to potential participants outlining the aims of the research project and inviting them to a focus group to be held in their area. Travel expenses, teacher-release days, and lunch were provided for all participants. Participants in the Christchurch focus group from an Invercargill centre and another from Dunedin had their airfares paid to attend. For the Hamilton focus group a number of participants travelled from Tokoroa. A centre from Palmerston North attended the focus group held in Porirua.

In total, across the six focus groups the profile of the sample for this research project was:

Twenty-three teachers/supervisors and two licensees from eighteen ā'oga 'āmata (Samoan centres)

Twelve teachers/supervisors and two licensees from seven punanga reo (Cook Islands centres)

Two teachers/supervisors and one licensee from three Niue centres

Two teachers/supervisors from one Tongan centre.

All ethnic groups were included in the focus groups except the Tuvalu centre in Auckland which did not respond to the invitation.

The composition of each of the focus groups in terms of representation of centres was as follows:

Group 1 (Wellington):	one ā'oga 'āmata (Samoan) one punanga o te reo Kuki Airani (Cook Islands)
Group 2 (Porirua):	five ā'oga 'āmata
Group 3 (Hamilton):	one ā'oga 'āmata a, five punanga
Group 4 (Central Auckland):	five ā'oga 'āmata, one punanga, one ako anga (Tongan centre)
Group 5 (South Auckland):	one ā'oga 'āmata, one ako anga, three Aoga Niue
Group 6 (Christchurch):	five ā'oga 'āmata.

Also attending and contributing across all the focus groups were:

- Six Pacific Islands co-ordinators from ECD (Rosetta Iupeli, Poko Tuaiti, Anastasia Laban,

Pepe Alefaio, Patricia Silao, and Malia Sema Mailangi) and Salā Edna Faleto'ese (Ta'ita'i Pasifika, ECD)

- Three research consultants from the parallel study: (Professor Helen May—focus groups 1 and 2, Dr Margaret Carr—focus group 3, and Dr Val Podmore—focus groups 4,5,6)
- Simon Easton from Stacey and Simons Consultants—focus group 3
- Two representatives of Pacific Islands early childhood training—focus group 4.

Focus Group Interview Questions

Invitees to the focus groups were sent a letter outlining the main topics to be covered together with material on the parallel project (Podmore & May, with Mara, 1998) at least a week prior to the focus group. The participants were asked to be prepared to give a short presentation, (say 5 to 10 minutes) on the ways in which they had worked to implement Te Whāriki. They were also informed that the group would be sharing some ideas for an action research proposal for evaluating and assessing Te Whāriki in PIECCs.

The information gathered in the course of the day-long focus group would be collated to answer two questions.

1. What is presently happening in PIECCs in the implementation of Te Whāriki?
2. Should there be an action research project in PIECCs on assessment and evaluation within the framework of Te Whāriki and how should it proceed?

Data collected from the focus group questions were further used to provide explanation, examples, and more in-depth analysis necessary to respond to the three research questions.

Participation and Procedures

In addition to the procedures described previously, each group was co-facilitated by one of the consultants (May, Carr, or Podmore) who reported on the background to the development of the Te Whāriki framework and the development of the parallel Te Whāriki research project. This aspect of the focus group (which was a presentation following the first focus group question) was intended to inform the participants about current research, shared by the actual researchers. In their concluding remarks, all focus group members expressed their appreciation of and admiration for the researchers and reported they had learnt a great deal from this part of the focus group day.

Recording of Feedback from Participants

All of the comments made by the focus group participants were recorded by two note-takers. These were collated and typed as draft notes which were then sent back to the participants of each focus group for comment, alteration, or addition. Amendments and changes were made, and a final record of each of the six focus groups was prepared. From the final scripts, responses to both focus group questions, and other issues raised in the groups, were collated.

Qualitative Data Analyses

The transcripts from the six focus group interviews were analysed systematically in relation to the research questions, by identifying and categorising main themes. The focus group findings are reported using a "descriptive" and "interpretative model" (Kreuger, 1988, p. 127). Themes which are consistent across the six focus groups are described, interpreted, and elaborated by the inclusion of quotations, notably from representatives of PIECCs. It should be noted that the sampling and analysis design of this focus group phase of the research was intended to yield rich qualitative data, rather than data for quantitative analyses.

RESULTS

Description of Te Whāriki in Action

As part of the first phase of their evaluation project, Podmore and May, with Mara (1998) provided an overview of Te Whāriki in action, drawing on information collected through focus groups. Participants from the various services, together with professional development representatives, shared their own or their organisation's experiences in implementing Te Whāriki. Some of the focus group participants provided documentation on planning and evaluation. Documentation included notes on the implementation of quality planning, and programme planning requirements and processes. It was important from the outset that any useful framework for evaluating the implementation of Te Whāriki should take into account each service's philosophy and the goals of the individual centre.

In terms of this study of PIECCs (which are relatively recent providers of care and education compared with kindergartens, for example), it was also a priority to obtain an overview of the implementation of Te Whāriki in these centres. As in the first study, the insights and experiences of those involved in professional development were sought by including them in the focus groups. The advisory committee meeting was, in one sense, a further focus group where the national Pacific Islands early childhood associations were able to share their experiences and involvements in the implementation of the Te Whāriki framework in their affiliated centres.

The results of this study are therefore presented following a description of how centres are currently implementing Te Whāriki, as reported in the focus groups. This is a necessary step, not only for the purpose of understanding the results themselves, but also as a further way of highlighting particular issues for PIECCs.

Implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs

After some initial reticence, participants from centres in all of the focus groups shared their current approaches in implementing Te Whāriki. From the group discussions the following themes emerged: planning, implementation of the strands, Pacific Island languages and Te Whāriki, and involvement of parents.

Planning

From the data collected in the focus groups it appears that staff at all but one of the PIECCs in this study use a thematic approach as their starting point when they plan and implement their curriculum. Centres reported a range of themes which included nutrition and healthy eating, land and transport, flowers, and food and clothing (it was winter at the time focus groups were being held so a current topic included keeping warm and dry and suitable clothing for colder conditions). One of the selected themes was then related back to a strand of Te Whāriki, for example, *Belonging*. One centre reported that they picked the strand first, then selected a topic or theme to explore it.

In terms of the length of planning periods, centre staff plan one theme every week, fortnight,

or month. Centres usually fit these shorter periods in to an overall term plan of activities. Written charts and planning (written in Samoan, for example) are in many centres displayed on the walls for parents to read and as reference for staff as well. Most centre staff plan co-operatively, and regularly share ideas which are then incorporated in a plan. One centre reported that the staff can only meet on a Sunday as the centre's hours do not permit all staff to be released at the same time for planning and preparation.

Staff at all centres report gathering individual child observations or daily records which are used as a basis for planning; in some centres these are recorded in books which are sent home. Some centres report that their observations are categorised under the headings, strands, and learning outcomes of Te Whāriki. Staff at centres licensed for children under 2 years of age reported that observations and planning for this age group are continuing to be a challenge. The needs of the child, and meeting the child's learning needs, were generally stated as being central to the planning and the curriculum of the centre.

Implementation of the Strands

There are five woven strands in Te Whāriki, and each strand has three or four goals. These "strands" were originally developed as parallel "aims" in Māori and English (May & Carr, 1997). The strands are:

- Strand 1: Mana Atua—*Wellbeing*
- Strand 2: Mana Whenua—*Belonging*
- Strand 3: Mana Tangata—*Contribution*
- Strand 4: Mana Reo—*Communication*
- Strand 5: Mana Aotūroa—*Exploration*.

Staff at centres shared how they were broadly implementing the strands of Te Whāriki. Almost all staff said their initial emphases had been on the strands *Wellbeing* (including health, safety, and nutrition), *Contribution*, and *Belonging*, with planned activities under these strands being of high priority. As staff from one centre reported:

> If these are not in place, the children do not learn.

Centre staff report that it was a challenge to come out of their training, facing the immediate task of implementation of the framework in their centre, and having to work with other staff, the parents, and the community. Their training had given them familiarity with the strands and learning outcomes of Te Whāriki, but the reality of implementing it for a particular group of children and their families was a different matter. In other words, translating the theory into practice was initially difficult due to their lack of experience in PIECCs, and their lack of experience working with families as required by Te Whāriki.

In terms of planned activities, many centre staff reported that outdoor activities, walks, and other trips, activities, and learning opportunities centred around food; eating, meals, and nutrition figured highly in their programme. Incorporating the child's cultural values and practices, including aspects of spirituality, was also seen as important. As one representative stated:

> The loving we create through Lotu (prayer), activities, storytelling in our own language—our priority is to maintain the language so the children can gain more from their later education and as they grow up through the education system.

Most representatives believe they are being successful in implementing one strand of Te Whāriki, namely *Belonging*. They find it relatively easy to recognise and incorporate cultural diversity very effectively into their programmes, including those centres which have a number of different ethnic groups represented. However, the remaining two strands—*Communication* and *Exploration*—were providing more of a challenge to implement fully.

Pacific Islands Languages and Te Whāriki

There were also some concerns expressed regarding the implementation of Te Whāriki primarily stemming from different understandings and interpretations (even within the Pacific ethnic groups) of the Te Whāriki document. For example, one group of Samoan ā'oga 'āmata in one geographical area has worked with its elders to translate the strands (*Wellbeing*, etc.) into a more classical form of the language. Yet another group in another city has translated the strands into more "accessible everyday" Samoan.

The Te Whāriki document was from the outset written in te reo Māori. Pacific Islands ethnic groups can readily find parallels to the Māori terms, but when applied to their own cultural contexts, their meanings are different. For example, the Tongan word "faliki" was explained in one focus group as the building of the foundation of the house. "Faliki" also describes a mat which is used to cover the floor—usually a coarse mat—one that everyone can stand on. Therefore "faliki" means, for them, a strong foundation.

The most important purpose for the different Pacific groups reinterpreting Te Whāriki for each of their own ethnic groups, is that through translation the underlying concepts of the framework can be readily understood by parents. Both teachers and the professional development personnel said that clear terminology was necessary to encourage parents to become fully involved and to feel part of the implementation of Te Whāriki.

There was general agreement that PIECCs must use their own language (be it Samoan, Cook Islands Māori, Tongan, or Niue) for the headings, terms, and concepts of Te Whāriki. There needed to be more discussion about when and how English should be used, and for whom, when discussing curriculum in PIECCs. The translation of the earlier draft version of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 1993) was reported to be an easier task than the translation of the final document, which was published in 1996. This draft is also the version preferred by PIECCs because it contains specific references to *Tangata Pasefika* and provides specific examples of how PIECCs can begin to implement Te Whāriki.

The Te Whāriki document has been translated into the Samoan language by the training provider A'oga Fa'afaiaoga Ā'oga 'Āmata in Wellington as its training is delivered entirely in the Samoan language. It was noted that where the training providers have translated the framework, their students, when subsequently employed in the centres, tended to be better able to communicate with parents about Te Whāriki.

It was also agreed that there is a need to achieve a level of consistency of translation of the strands and goals of Te Whāriki across the country, so that parents can receive a consistent

message. Different groups shared how in their own area they have translated the framework—by seeking help from elders, and their national associations. For example, it was reported that Kautaha Aoga Niue and Utu Lelei, as national associations, have already translated the principles of Te Whāriki in words and have also interpreted concepts in terms of their own cultural contexts and meanings. These associations are now working to make sure the terms and interpretations of the curriculum framework become consistent across all their affiliated centres.

The Niue centres reported that as a group they have translated the strands of Te Whāriki into the Niue language. The main issue, they report, is finding the "right" word—not just a translation from English but the concept itself needs to be developed. They expanded the meaning of the English word because they felt it was important for the parents and the Niue community to know and understand the value of play and what it means in terms of learning. They are assisted by the national early childhood association, Kautaha Aoga Niue Incorporated, to combine the theory they learnt during training with their practice.

Another example came from a Tongan centre which reported that the national association, Utu Lelei, had been holding meetings and consulting on the Te Whāriki framework. As a result of this there have emerged strands expressed in the Tongan language and based on Tongan values. In the process they have added two further strands: "our children are treasures from God" and "respect" to their curriculum framework. Again the objective was to make their curriculum appropriate and relevant to their own language and cultural values and more accessible to parents and the community. The centre reports that they speak in Tongan about the strands and plan in their own languages as well.

In Cook Islands Māori the implementation of Te Whāriki was described as follows:

> Our Te Whāriki is a round mat and it is unfinished: we need to share to complete it. The main obstacles/challenges to completing it are really finance and professional development of staff and centres. The demands and pressures on them are tremendous. We need to begin at stating where we are, where we want to go and what we need to get there—resources and funding will help.

Involvement of Parents

Representatives from all centres mentioned the involvement of parents, caregivers, and the community as an important aspect of implementing the principles of Te Whāriki. Participants at focus groups produced a great deal of information about how centres work to achieve positive and involving relationships with their families. Most centre staff have regular meetings with their parents, either on arrival or departure and/or at set meetings. Attendance is good when there is an interesting topic or speaker at parent group meetings. Topics include health, emotional needs of children, and Te Whāriki. Centre staff report they make a real effort to communicate with parents about what they are teaching and why—by wall charts for them to read, newsletters, informal talks with them, and involving them on trips.

However, representatives from some centres note that for many parents contributions and involvement may be very difficult in terms of resources, funds, or other family commitments. Most PIECCs are located in areas of high unemployment, poor housing, and high health needs. The ability of their communities to raise funds, contribute in material ways, or pay fees is very limited. They note this as an important difference in comparison with some other early childhood

provisions. Many centres, however, pointed out that they are rich in terms of native speakers and ability to bring in parents and community people for stories, songs, dances, and arts and craft.

Representatives from the centres expressed some continuing concerns in relation to the implementation of Te Whāriki. These relate directly to the need to be accountable to the Pacific communities and to parents. Parents need to be conversant with all aspects of the management and curriculum development of the centre their child attends. There are, however, particular concerns expressed by centre staff as they work to involve and inform parents about the many facets of running a centre. First, there was a concern about whether Te Whāriki is widely understood as a document, even though training providers incorporate this in their training courses. The need for translation is important, centre representatives report, to help their parents gain a better understanding about the programme itself (the activities and the learning outcomes) and a better understanding about their own children's learning and development. This is a particular challenge for staff.

Second, some centres report that the large amount of documentation required by statutory agencies is sometimes difficult for them to fit into a limited time. Added to this time pressure, is the demand to use the terminology of written English for those whose first language is not English. Centre staff noted that the time used for these duties takes time away from reporting to parents, helping parents to appreciate this aspect of the running of the centre. The paperwork has got to be "good for the child!", it was said, to be the most useful.

Third, the ā'oga 'āmata (Samoan centres), in particular, are also implementing two curriculum frameworks simultaneously—*Te Whāriki* and the *Ta'iala* frameworks. This had initially presented some difficulties for them, which now appear to be in the process of being resolved through the professional development contract. Parents were being helped to understand the two curriculum statements and how these are being integrated.

Fourth, one focus group in particular mentioned the wider context within which PIECCs are required to implement the curriculum: pressures on the staff to be responsible for the financial survival of the centre when most of their families have few or little resources themselves; the expertise required to "run like a business" like other early childhood provisions; providing for parent education and support; and providing experiences and resources for learning in a bicultural or immersion situation. Again these are particular challenges for staff when building or maintaining the involvement of Pacific parents.

Professional Development

This section of the results relates to research question (1)— What are the current professional development provisions for the implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs? Current provisions are described, and the experiences as shared in the focus groups of professional development personnel and the centres are detailed. The relationship between professional development for the implementation of Te Whāriki, and professional development provisions for the implementation of *Ta'iala* (Samoan language curriculum document) as experienced by ā'oga 'āmata are outlined. The remaining question in terms of professional development provision will always be—how will professional development improve learning outcomes for children?

Descriptive Outline of Professional Development

The Main Provider

The following information on current provisions is developed from material sent to all licensed and chartered centres by Early Childhood Development describing its programmes for 1998–99:

> Early Childhood Development (ECD) has been contracted by the Ministry of Education to provide professional development and support to licensed and chartered Pacific Islands early childhood centres. Its focus is on the Implementation of Te Whāriki and the revised Desirable Objectives and Practices (DOPs). ECD uses three approaches to deliver this professional development. One of these approaches, which is targeted to meet the needs of PIECCs, is called *He Kete Pasifika* and has been specifically developed by Pacific Islands facilitators. It takes an holistic approach, is based on common Pacific learning philosophies, and aims to assist staff and management to implement Te Whāriki and the revised DOPs through their daily practices.
>
> The programmes ECD offers (free of charge to individuals and centres) are based on a participatory learning model using action research and an action learning process. There are two model options to the delivery of professional development: either in-depth individual or whole centre development, or through cluster workshops linked to individual whole centre support. ECD offers some participatory funding to centres and is able to provide delivery at times that are convenient to the centre. Up to 20 hours or an average of 12–15 hours of skilled facilitator time is available to the centres. ECD facilitators are able to provide appropriate cultural background to assist educators, managers, management committees, and/or parents in implementing Te Whāriki and incorporating the revised DOPs in their programmes and management plans.

In the focus groups ECD Pacific Islands facilitators reported on some of the local aspects of their delivery and shared their perspectives on how centres within their area were developing in terms of their implementation of Te Whāriki. It needs to be taken into account when reading the reported comments from the focus groups that the delivery of professional development by ECD for the Ministry of Education had at that time only run about 6–7 months and that ECD makes overall milestone reports to the Ministry on its processes and progress within the contract.

ECD has been awarded a 2-year contract with the Ministry of Education in which thirty-three PIECCs nationally have agreed to work with them in the *He Kete Pasifika* programme (90 percent of PIECCs).

Other Providers

A small number of PIECCs are working with other professional development providers or consultancies which have also won contracts with the Ministry of Education. In the sample of participants of the focus groups in this study, only one other provider that is working with a *punanga reo*—Stacey and Simon Consultants (which operate in the central North Island)—

attended a focus group along with that punanga reo. They work from a needs-analysis basis also.

The negotiations between the Ministry of Education and the Kautaha Aoga (Niue) professional development contract had not been finalised at the time the focus groups for this study were being held.

Experiences of Provision

Comments from the Professional Development Personnel

ECD Pacific facilitators in each area attended the focus groups and shared their involvement and their perspectives on the developments in the centres with which they worked. Generally, they reported that Te Whāriki is "in place" and being implemented although different centres are at different levels of development. They all note a growing confidence and familiarity with the early childhood curriculum framework. They emphasised that this current contract with the thirty-three centres has only been operating in 1998 so it is difficult to assess their success with PIECCs. They agreed that many centres need a little more time (and familiarity) to more closely identify and articulate both their professional development needs and also their "gaps".

One particularly important aspect of their work is made easier by the fact that the framework and many of the terms have been translated. Therefore, the ability to be able to converse with staff in their own Pacific languages was very important to ECD staff, especially in interpreting and putting into action the aims and strands of Te Whāriki. This was not only important for educators and management in the centres, but also for assisting parents to understand the framework and what centres are trying to achieve with their children. Facilitators reported they use English as their language medium for the overall delivery, but extensive use is also made of Samoan, Tongan, and Cook Islands Māori. One example shared, which demonstrates the complexity of language and the extent to which ECD makes a real effort in this regard, involved the delivery of professional development to a Tuvalu group. The facilitator herself was unable to speak the Tuvalu language, but she spoke Samoan and was able, through the centre supervisor (who spoke both), to get everything translated from Samoan to the Tuvalu language and back again.

ECD staff involved in a previous professional development contract welcome the expansion of the contract from the initial trial of ten centres (in Auckland): "It is a chance for us . . . to build on our experience" and what has already been delivered to centres. One person reported that she also liked the opportunity to work with individual centres as well as working with clusters, as had been done in the past. All groups reported that they would also like to see staff receive more release time as a group during centre hours for professional development of all staff together. At present most of it has to occur "after hours", following full-day (8 a.m.–5 p.m.) operation.

An ECD Pacific co-ordinator, who works with parents in Pacific Islands language groups (PILGs), attended one of the focus groups and shared her work and approaches. Although PILGs are not required to implement Te Whāriki as such, many of its principles and concepts are already being introduced to parents without using the specific terms or labels. This Samoan co-ordinator works with her own people in cluster workshops:

> I relate Te Whāriki to the home environment. I draw a circle with home and centre/school/church—I (explain) I am part of this environment and that is Te

> Whāriki . . . I talk about the environment of the centre and the activities of the centres also as 'environment . . .' I relate to my background. We need to relate to parents about their own upbringing and relating that to the 'environment' of the family. Self-esteem and confidence is important to us as Samoan—the question is how do the parents do this in their homes . . . With the unlicensed centres, the parents are there and they can take their relationships from home into the centre.

Such work in the PILGs is not only important as parent education and a basis for improving programme quality, but is also very useful as groups move towards licensing and chartering. In the preparation towards the (required) implementation of Te Whāriki, parents who have participated in such programmes will have already been exposed to, and have some understanding of, the underlying principles and aims of Te Whāriki.

ECD staff in the professional development team are also very clear that they act as facilitators—that they work alongside the centres and do not go in with preconceived ideas. For example, staff at all centres tend to use a thematic approach to planning, and ECD developers work with the current themes in use, and assist in relating these to Te Whāriki. As one ECD co-ordinator said, centres have to get to know Te Whāriki "thoroughly—to read it and read it!", so that they can work effectively with them. A number of ECD staff stressed the importance of feedback from practitioners in terms of the approaches and processes they use with centre staff that can provide an effective and appropriate service.

Comments from Centres

In terms of professional development, all centre staff across all of the focus groups in this study report high levels of satisfaction with the help and support given by the ECD facilitators (*see* programme outline from ECD on p. 16.) Centre representatives said:

> ECD is our backbone. . . .We have very good support [from them]. Our approach is the child is the centre of everything. It is so pleasing to see the children express themselves in all types of ways within the [planned] theme. We have picked up points from the ERO report which help us to get better.

> As a new supervisor, I created my long-term and short-term planning, with help from ECD and arising from the ERO report . . . we really need the support of ECD, we need to go out and get new ideas.

Another centre reported on how it liked working with ECD and commented favourably about working in a cluster:

> ECD is very helpful. We went through all the strands of Te Whāriki [with them] . . . we helped our mothers to understand [their children's learning] in new ways . . . we have a long-term programme and we break it down, we implement the five strands—even though we are trained we still need help. We are in a cluster of four centres and our group meets once a month, with a follow-up from ECD in individual centres. Each centre shares what happens under each strand and how children are involved.

Many centres report, however, that 20 hours per year is not really enough time to spend with their facilitator—they would welcome more, and their inability to get relieving teachers to release staff for professional development is a continuing frustration.

One punanga shared how it had completed a needs analysis of its centre, with the assistance of the ECD Pacific Islands co-ordinator, as a starting point in the provision of professional development delivery of Te Whāriki. As a result of this process, staff were able to articulate its priorities as a centre which were:

- using (and maintaining) the Cook Islands Māori language,
- linking with parents as a basis for developing relationships within the centre,
- management issues (including planning for professional development of staff),
- translating reciprocal relationships and links through the home language and bringing these into the centre,
- linking the charter, DOPs, and Te Whāriki, and
- improving observational skills (particularly with children under 2, non-verbal stages of development, observing interactions, planning with assurance, extension of the older children, ability to be flexible, reflecting on planning, and extending play and routines).

Te Whāriki and the Implementation of *Ta'iala mo le Gagana Samoa*

Ā'oga 'āmata (Samoan early childhood centres) are implementing two curriculum documents: Te Whāriki and *Ta'iala* (*see* p. 3 for description of *Ta'iala*).

There have been four separate professional development contracts let by the Ministry of Education between 1996 and 1998 for the implementation of the *Ta'iala*. These have been delivered by the Wellington College of Education (two contracts, 1997–98; 1998–99) and through the Pacific Islands Early Childhood Council of Aotearoa (PIECCA) in 1997 and 1998 (*The Education Gazette*, 29 September 1997, p. 17; 21 September 1998, pp. 20 & 21).

Staff at centres which are implementing both curriculum documents reported that initially they experienced some confusion between the two. Although a close relationship with Te Whāriki occurred when the *Ta'iala* document was developed, subsequent professional development contracts for both have come from different providers and at different times. These circumstances may have accounted for some of the initial confusion. However, the distinction is now becoming clearer due to the continuing professional development they have received. One centre reported that once its staff began to think of the *Ta'iala* as coming under the strand *Communication* in Te Whāriki, this helped them to see more clearly the relationship between the two. The facilitator of the *Ta'iala* contract in Wellington reports how the ā'oga 'āmata involved have become much more skilled in action research and in identifying their needs. The *Ta'iala* is also reported by ECD staff as being a very good starting point for work with ā'oga 'āmata. A study by Burgess (1998) details how the two documents are blended through examining the nature of teacher plans using both documents, the planning methods used, and the features of the environment within which planning by two selected teachers occurred. Results of this study are referred to in more detail in a later discussion.

A query arose from two focus groups about how the Ministry of Education saw the relationship between the two curriculum documents (the *Ta'iala* and Te Whāriki), having tendered out contracts for both, and to what extent it has used any information gathered from

previous contracts in subsequent policy and planning of Pacific Islands early childhood education initiatives.

Issues raised in *An Evaluation of Pilot Early Childhood Professional Development Programs to Support Curriculum Implementation* (Gaffney & Smith, 1997) in terms of context features which led to success or failure of professional development are pertinent to this study and are discussed later. What is important ultimately is the benefit derived by children and their families from professional development. Gaffney and Smith conclude:

> This study has reaffirmed that the link between curriculum professional development and outcomes for children is to be found in changes to the process of curriculum planning. Changes identified by participants within the current study included the integration of *Te Whāriki* into this process of curriculum planning which in turn is starting to change the way educarers think about children. (p. 87)

Assessing Children's Learning and Evaluating Centres

In response to research question (2)—What current approaches are the PIECCs employing in the assessment of children's learning and the evaluation of their centres in the implementation of Te Whāriki?—staff from the centres represented in the focus groups shared their current approaches to assessment and evaluation. The themes concerning assessment and evaluation that emerged from the analysis of the focus group data were observing individual children, working with parents and the community, and assessing and evaluating according to the strands of Te Whāriki. It needs to be noted that these results contain reports by centres. Research based in the centres themselves would be needed to detail more specifically the links between observation, assessment, and planning.

Observing Individual Children

Different centres had different approaches, but essentially all included daily individual observations of children as their main form of data gathering for assessment purposes. One ā'oga 'āmata keeps records for each child in an observation book which is retained for "monitoring quality and staff development". A punanga reports that its staff observe each child during the daily programme, and when the children are asleep staff sit together and discuss what they have observed. In this centre too, children spend a lot of time outdoors so they are observed there. In terms of their overall programme, staff from this punanga reo report:

> At the end of each day staff talk about the day's events and plan for the next day. They link their overall plans with the strands [of Te Whāriki].

A drawback about observations, noted by a number of focus groups, was the extensive time that observations take and the inability to get involved while one is observing the children.

Staff from another centre (a punanga) showed how they used checklists which are placed under the Te Whāriki strands with headings for planned, related activities. For some of the activities, children's names are listed and are marked/ticked to record the participation and turn-taking of each child. This was helpful, in ensuring that consistent routines for the children, such as changing and toileting, were being achieved.

In an ā'oga 'āmata with six staff, the observations of the children are shared: each staff member has two to three children to observe. The observations are written into a book, which is taken home by the parents, who are asked to note down observations of the child at home, and return the book to the centre. The supervisor, who is the overall assessor of the observations in this centre, believes that it is important to involve the family and community so that they can share their experiences of their children in different situations, and so find out more about them. After being collected, the observations are used in planning.

Teachers in PIECCs have another challenge to overcome with their parents. Teachers observed that many parents are still "over-protective" of their children and need to be persuaded about the value of allowing children to play, for example, with sand and water; to go outside to play; to take risks and to explore; to ask questions; to engage in discussions. Parents provide many valuable things for their children in terms of cultural values, language, music, and craft, but some centre staff think parents also need to be made aware of their children's learning and development so that they can contribute to those processes and be able to work more closely with the centre staff.

Many parents, centre representatives report, need time and continuing contact to become fully participating, to feel more comfortable in communicating with centre staff about learning, rather than seeing the staff as "experts" about their child—it has to be a co-operative effort. This puts extra demands on staff in PIECCs to work with them in resolving differences between home practices and expectations and centre routines and expectations. Centre representatives mention, in particular, areas such as allowing children to explore (to get dirty or wet), allowing children to express themselves, and discipline as being areas requiring continuing dialogue with Pacific Islands parents.

One example of how important it is for staff and parents to have a shared understanding about play and learning experiences was described in relation to the exploration of a toddler in a punanga. Representatives from the punanga described how, for several days, staff had watched the girl take tentative steps up a ladder in the playground. As each day went by, under their watchful eye, the toddler became more confident to attempt and succeed in climbing a step higher. Staff thought it was important to let her try. One day a parent saw this child climbing and she rushed over and grabbed her off the ladder—with very good intentions, in terms of safety—however, the staff felt that this may have affected the child's confidence to try again. This incident also pointed out to staff that they needed to communicate better with parents in their centre about why they allowed this exploration and about the importance of learning through exploration. The relationship with goals 2 and 3 and the learning outcomes of *Exploration* in Te Whāriki, namely—

> Goal 2: Children experience an environment where they gain confidence in and control of their bodies.
> Goal 3: Children experience an environment where they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking, and reasoning (Ministry of Education, 1996c, pp. 86 & 88)

—is evident in this example.

Assessing and Evaluating According to the Strands of Te Whāriki

As outlined previously, staff from centres represented in the focus groups felt that they were confident in their implementation of the strands *Belonging, Wellbeing,* and *Contribution. Communication* and *Exploration* are strands that require further development. Therefore, staff from centres participating in the focus groups reported more on those strands in relation to assessment and evaluation.

Representatives from one ā'oga 'āmata shared an example of how they are implementing and assessing *Belonging* through observation and reflection:

> [The] children [are] feeling good and safe when welcomed to the centre by staff warmly greeting them. [We are] ensuring that the centre is the place where children want to be and it is comfortable and free. Another safe environment away from home where children are willing to be. It is very important to make children welcome and to make them feel they belong at the centre.

In addition the staff in this ā'oga 'āmata are clear about their roles and responsibility to provide a context in which "responsive, reciprocal" relationships are clearly visible and operating.

Another ā'oga 'āmata described the same "event" [arrivals] in their centre:

> When they come in the morning greetings are important so that they start well and learn later. We ensure they feel they belong as they are entering another world that is outside the family so we ensure they are looked after very well and supported.

An ā'oga 'āmata that is implementing *Ta'iala* as well as Te Whāriki has made links in relation to evaluation:

> Ta'iala fits under *Communication* in Te Whāriki. In our evaluation of Ta'iala we observe the behaviour under *[Communication]*, then we intervene to make a change in the behaviour if we need to.

As representatives from one centre expressed it: "We need to produce evidence to go with the headings (of Te Whāriki)". Staff went on to report how they collect their "evidence":

> [We] link events such as going to the library, lunch times, outdoor play time with the strands. Checklists are used to ensure turn-taking, equal and regular attention to such routines as toileting and changing. This evidence is used to communicate with parents, demonstrate to others, and help staff to keep track of children for planning.

A further purpose of the recording and filing of observations was shared by representatives from another centre:

> Our observations are daily and we put them into files and note especially those at risk.

In this study, informants from the centres represented were able to articulate what they do and why they do it in terms of assessing and evaluating, but further centre-based research is required to be able to be more specific in describing how centres and staff are achieving the learning outcomes for the children. An ever-growing familiarity (and confidence) with implementing Te Whāriki is apparent, although more time is now required for professional development to proceed, and for the identification of further resourcing needs.

Issues and Challenges Now and in the Future

Centre representatives identified a number of issues during the focus groups which are restated here.

- Meeting the requirements for documentation as required by ERO in terms of time and written English.
- Understanding the language used in official documents in such a way as to be able to easily translate these for parents and the community.
- Meeting the needs of diverse groups in the centre (particularly southern and rural centres where there are only small numbers of each Pacific group or community).
- Having sufficient time (and release) for intensive team planning and evaluation as an exercise for all staff together.
- Working in communities where parents have limited incomes or material resources.
- Having available appropriate resources for implementing bilingual and immersion language programmes.
- Providing support for unlicensed PIECCs in relation to Te Whāriki so that parents and children have access to and understanding of the document. This is desirable not only as preparation for licensing and chartering, but also because it is an holistic approach to learning and development which ensures quality experiences for the children whether the early childhood provision is eventually licensed or not.
- Transition to school policies are very important. Several centres said they thought they were operating quite well in terms of transition to school. One centre, however, is concerned about how the assessments they make of their children are used by the schools when the children enrol at primary school.

Developing a Proposal for Action Research in PIECCs on Assessment and Evaluation Using Te Whāriki

This section relates the information recorded from the focus groups to research question (3)—What would be the important criteria for selection of centres, elements, and processes to include in an action research project for PIECCs in the evaluation of the implementation of Te Whāriki? This information was gathered following a discussion and explanation of the action research process itself and the sharing of information by the consultants (May, Carr, and Podmore) about the action research currently being established in the project: *Learning and Teaching Stories: An Approach to Assessment and Evaluation in Early Childhood*. The following is a brief summary of some of the material presented to each focus group.

Outline of the Learning and Teaching Stories Project

This is an action research project, designed to develop holistic assessment and evaluation in early childhood centres, based on the principles and strands of Te Whāriki. The intention is to trial the framework of "learning and teaching stories" (an approach developed in the previous phases of the study). Learning and teaching stories are:

> . . . observations and narrative reflections for use by teachers and practitioners to assess and evaluate programmes within their centres. (Carr, May, & Podmore, 1998b, p. 3)

A more detailed explanation of learning stories and teaching stories is found in Carr (1998) and Podmore and May, with Mara (1998). The subsequent action research phase of the project is working alongside three Ministry of Education contracts for early childhood professional development programmes in Wellington, Christchurch, and Auckland. In each area a co-ordinator-researcher is working with two centres over 1998–99. The action research spiral approach implemented in the six centres includes planning, acting and observing, and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

"Planning" refers to participants at each centre developing their own overall "teaching story" which is derived from observations by practitioners in the course of their everyday work, focusing on adults, children, and specific teaching/learning contexts. In "acting and observing", staff apply their teaching story to improve practice by discussion and reflection, and by observation using their teaching story and learning story frameworks. Centre staff then "reflect" on their management or practices, and this appraisal leads to action. The spiral begins a second time where planning is used to enhance quality with regard to Te Whāriki, as evaluated with the teaching story and assessed in the learning stories.

In conjunction with the co-ordinator-researcher, centre staff are developing and/or trialling various assessment and evaluation "tools". Their primary point of reference is to the "children's questions" that were developed in the assessment and evaluation framework in Podmore and May with Mara (1998, p. 122). It is intended that the approaches and "tools" developed and trialled will be efficient, robust, and useful to centres.

The consultants who spoke to the focus groups outlined the history and development of Te Whāriki from the first consultations, which included representatives from Pacific Islands early childhood practitioners. All stressed the need for staff at PIECCs to develop their own approaches to assessment and evaluation in line with their own philosophy and aims. They made it clear the findings of the two initial research studies and the approach taken in the action research phase were being presented to the focus groups only as a suggestion on way to proceed.

It was also found to be important in the focus groups to develop a shared understanding about what action research is, and how it could operate to assist centres in self-assessment and evaluation. A discussion was held in each group to clarify the action research approach. This was held as a preparation for a response to the question of whether it would be useful to proceed with an action research proposal, and for group members to describe the important features of such a study.

Responses from the Focus Groups

All of the members of the six focus groups unanimously agreed that a proposal for action research in PIECCs should be developed. The presentations by the consultants were all responded to positively; nods of recognition and understanding were a feature of this section of the day's programme. In closing comments, many of the focus group members referred to the participation and contributions of the consultants as a highlight of the programme.

All the ideas and suggestions that emerged as a result of brainstorming from each group, as to the nature and content of an action research proposal, were collated and are presented here.

The Proposed Research Sample

A range of views was expressed; a final decision, based on an overview of the suggestions offered, would be required if a proposal were to proceed. Collated suggestions include that:

- the sample should be representative of all Pacific Islands groups;
- well-established and more experienced centres be involved so that ideas can be shared;
- one highly involved centre could be paired with a less experienced centre, or at least a range of centres be included in the sample;
- ideally this should be a national (level) project in a range of areas;
- the study should involve fewer centres but more intensively—"start small" was one comment;
- any study should take into account the nature of the different needs of the staffs in Pacific Islands centres;
- the study should include a mix of centres in terms of their staff training backgrounds, e.g., Pacific Islands Early Childhood Training, colleges of education, Ā'oga 'Āmata Training, and NZ Childcare Association/Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa;
- the sample should include one centre that is working with children and families from mixed ethnic groups or a number of different groups;
- the study should include three South Island centres;
- the larger part of the sample should be in Auckland as a majority of the centres are there;
- some unlicensed centres should be included as they need access to Te Whāriki as much as the licensed and chartered centres.

Proposed Characteristics of the Co-ordinators-Researchers

Focus group members all thought the concept of a co-ordinator-researcher would be valuable for PIECCs, but they were clear that it was important that the person possessed particular, appropriate skills and knowledge to work effectively with their centres. Such people would have to:

- be a good role model, committed to the task, and have an overall positive attitude;
- have good communication skills, including being a fluent speaker of the centre's main language of instruction, and be culturally skilled and sensitive;
- be able to document (the processes and outcomes) accurately and objectively;
- be sensitive to gender and aware of the influence of gender on learning and development;

- be healthy (a non-smoker!);
- be able to work alongside centres, establishing trust and credibility;
- share the same values as the centre, be knowledgeable and sensitive about the workings of the centre;
- be able to work as part of a team;
- have skills and experience in working with parents and Pacific communities;
- work with the centre on questions the centres themselves identify;
- possess qualifications and experience as an ECE educator;
- have a thorough knowledge of Te Whāriki;
- have research skills (or be able to be trained in action research methods and techniques);
- have a sound theoretical base/understanding and be able to effectively link theory and practice;
- be skilled in relating particular learning experiences with the strands of Te Whāriki.

Proposed Methodology

Focus groups were generally positive about the methods developed in the first Te Whāriki studies. These included working alongside existing professional development contracts, the use of co-ordinators-researchers, and the use of an action research approach. However, some suggestions for particular modifications emerged from the discussions. Members also placed some conditions—which are described below—on those approaches.

- Centre staff should develop their skills and understanding of action research methods and improve their ability to theorise, as a result of this project.
- The need to incorporate a range of different ways of recording, for example, video, photos should be accepted.
- Expectations of the staff and parents and their roles in the study are made very clear.
- The study should take an holistic approach across all the five strands, for example, taking one event and relating this both to how the centre works and to Te Whāriki—to show how each strand supports and relates (is woven into) the other strands.

Further, the groups discussed some implications for centres if they became involved in this proposed action research study.

- Such a study should not be too onerous for the staff or centres to undertake.
- The study should take fully into account the time pressures placed on staff.
- The study should not involve too much paperwork.
- The need for day/time release for all staff to participate in the process should be recognised as the only effective way to incorporate all staff.
- Sufficient funding and resourcing must be allocated to address the above.
- It must be acknowledged that staff in PIECCs may need more help/support in getting to know what action research is, and how it can help them in assessing children's learning and evaluating their centre.
- Researchers need to be wary of "recipes", as centres will (and should) assess and evaluate according to their own philosophies and values.

Outcomes and Dissemination of Results from a Proposed Study

Focus groups were asked to articulate what they thought would be the purpose and possible outcomes of an action research study. It was important for focus group members to restate why such a study would be worthwhile as such information could be included in a rationale for a future proposal. Several groups also considered how centres which were not included in the proposed study could still benefit from it. Their collated suggestions include the following:

- In such a study we would be asking our own questions.
- Such a study should add to our ways of defining "quality", in our own terms.
- This study would be a way of promoting our professional development standards as a staff.
- By being a part of this study we would be developing our own professionalism as "reflective practitioners".
- Any study must result in long-term benefits for our children; in fact all children should be benefiting from the strands of Te Whāriki.
- The study must enhance the lives of our children.
- Through the study parents and communities should become more comfortable with Te Whāriki.
- Through the study Pacific Islands early childhood educators should feel more confident in their implementation of Te Whāriki, including assessment and evaluation approaches.
- Any documentation collected in the study must be appropriate and easily understood in order to be able to be used by other PIECCs.
- The study should show how Te Whāriki is being put into place in our centres.
- The study should enhance the accountability of PIECCs to all the stakeholders.
- The models that centres may develop should be readily communicated to other PIECCs, so that ideas can be shared.
- The study should be able to review what has worked well, and what could be improved.
- From the study, centres could identify their resource needs, appropriate facilitators, and the funding required for implementation.
- Any study should result in the production of a book/report or similar resource that everyone can have access to and read.
- The study should outline different case studies and models of assessment and evaluation from which centres can choose.

Further Consultation

The information collected from the focus groups was summarised and an outline of the main issues was presented to the project advisory committee in a first outline of a draft report. The comments and suggested amendments to the proposed action research question (3) from the committee members have already been incorporated in the above results. The remaining issues raised by the advisory committee, in relation to research questions (1) and (2), are included in more detail in the later discussion. The issues that emerged from the focus groups were largely confirmed by the advisory committee, including the nature and duration of professional development, and the issues of language and the translation of Te Whāriki for PIECCs.

The Pacific Islands early childhood national associations were represented on the advisory

committee, and it was decided that this report should incorporate a short summary of what each Pacific ethnic association is currently doing to help its affiliated centres to implement Te Whāriki.

Utu Lelei (the Tongan National Early Childhood Association)

In April 1998 Utu Lelei started working to assist all Tongan ako'anga (both licensed and unlicensed) to implement Te Whāriki through the development of a Tongan curriculum document. The development, since April, has occurred in two phases: the first involved the setting out of the principles and strands consistent with Te Whāriki and adding two further principles—*Ko e fanau ko e tofi'a ke tauhi* (children are our gifts from God) and *Faka' apa'apa* (respect). All the principles and strands were translated into Tongan and discussed at meetings held throughout the country. In the second phase of development the goals and learning outcomes for each of these strands have been divided up nationally: two strands for Auckland, two for the central region, and one strand in the South Island. Each area is charged with developing learning activities which put into practice those particular goals and the learning outcomes they are responsible for. Utu Lelei collated all of these developments and included them in a draft document which has gone out for comment. It is planned that the Tongan curriculum document will be published by the Institute of Early Childhood Studies at Victoria University during 1999. Utu Lelei gratefully acknowledges the support of ECD which has enabled its Tongan co-ordinators to take part in facilitating the development process. Utu Lelei is also grateful to the Institute of Early Childhood Studies and the Department of Education (both at Victoria University of Wellington) for their support in this project. Utu Lelei is a community-based association which has limited resources for such an exercise apart from the goodwill, commitment, and energies of its members.

Te Punanga o te Reo Kuki Airani

This organisation has set up a national committee, based in Hamilton, which is looking at developing the strands within Te Whāriki to incorporate Cook Islands Māori language and their customs and values. This committee is also responsible for looking at the use of Cook Islands Māori as a language of instruction in primary schools. A particular feature of Cook Islands Māori is that there are island-based dialectical variations such as Rarotongan, Pukupukan, and so on, which have to be taken into account in programmes within the punanga (centres).

Sosaiete Ā'oga 'Āmata Samoa i Aotearoa Inc

The Sosaiete Ā'oga 'Āmata Samoa i Aotearoa (SA'ASIA) has run workshops for planning programmes based on the principles, strands, and learning outcomes of Te Whāriki. The workshops have been presented each year for 3 years (1996–1998) at the SA'ASIA annual conference by Mrs Fereni Ete and Afioga Afamasaga Telesia McDonald.

Kautaha Aoga Niue

This national Niue early childhood association, in conjunction with the aoga Niue (centres) it is supporting towards licensing and chartering status, has translated the strands of Te Whāriki into the Niue language. The main issue, it reports, is finding the "right" word—not just finding a direct

translation of terms from English but describing the concept itself, in the Niue community's own cultural terms, and this requires careful interpretation. The exercise was carried out in this way because the association felt it was important for the parents and the Niue community to know and understand the value of play and what it means in terms of learning, using their own Niue language and terms. In addition, the association and the recently trained staff in aoga Niue are working together to incorporate the theory they have learnt during training, with their practice, and applying this to meet the needs of the Niue children and families they serve.

DISCUSSION

This discussion brings together the main issues that were raised by the focus groups and subsequently by the advisory committee primarily concerning professional development and the issues of language and translation of Te Whāriki. These and other related issues, such as continuing resource implications, and developing a closer relationship between theory and practice, are analysed and discussed in relation to the wider issues and to current research. All the aforementioned contribute to answering the three research questions. Lastly, implications derived from the findings are discussed in terms of outstanding issues and priorities for continuing professional development provision and for subsequent research.

Context

Before embarking on a discussion of the main issues, it is necessary to outline the present context within which many PIECCs are operating. As with all other services in the early childhood sector, PIECCs are facing continuing (and changing) sets of regulations and requirements. All early childhood centres have had to become acquainted with the revised DOPs; for some centres this means renegotiating their charters. In addition, many of those recently licensed and chartered PIECCs continue to experience the challenges of ensuring all facets of their operation are continuing to working smoothly and effectively, having probably gone through a long process of just reaching that status. Some of these experiences are documented in *Progress Towards Licensing and Chartering Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres in New Zealand* (Mara, 1998). The relative lack of experience and institutional (or system) knowledge, in comparison with some other early childhood providers, must be added to the challenges PIECCs currently face across all areas of management, staffing, professional development, parent/community relationships, and—most importantly—providing for the positive development and learning of Pacific Islands children.

The implementation of the national early childhood curriculum "framework": Te Whāriki has presented a further challenge for PIECCs. Although "Tangata Pasifika" were involved at all stages in the development of the document (since before 1993), staff atPIECCs have to add an extra "dimension" to their programmes (similar to nga kohanga reo). Most importantly, in addition to providing early childhood care and education, PIECCs exist to provide for the maintenance of Pacific languages and cultural values and practices in New Zealand-Aotearoa. The complete implementation of Te Whāriki by PIECCs has required each of the main Pacific ethnic groups to look again at its own philosophy, aims, and pedagogy to ensure the provisions of learning and teaching experiences give children direct access to their heritage, languages, and cultures. For Samoan a'oga 'amata it has also involved linking and implementing Te Whāriki with the *Ta'ıala* (the Samoan language curriculum document) (*see* p. 3 for explanations of *Ta'ıala* and Te Whāriki).

A further important need is for Pacific parents and caregivers to be fully informed about policies, regulations, and requirements of centres providing early childhood education. Where these requirements are written only in English, barriers to achieving full understanding have been set up, particularly for parents in communities where English is not their first language. The staff of PIECCs are often carrying out that extra task of translation in order to foster parental and

community understanding and involvement.

The key role played by staff in PIECCs in linking with parents and the wider community was mentioned often in the focus groups. Staff have become acquainted during their training with current theories of learning and child development. In some key areas, staff have had to reconcile their "new" knowledge with more "traditional" or cultural practices related to particular beliefs about learning and socialisation. Areas where there appears to be such conflict include the discipline of children, and the role of play and exploration.

In addition, Pacific Islands parents and families (in comparison with other families) have fewer material resources from which PIECCs may be able to derive extra income or support. A number of references were made to this fact in the focus groups. Statistics New Zealand, in its Pacific Islands Profile series (1998), compares the median income of all adult New Zealanders, which is $15,600, with the adult Tongan median income, which is $5,700 less. Cook Islands adults receive $3,000 less; Samoan adults receive $2,800 less; and Niue adults receive $2,200 less. In 1996, in terms of Income Support, 33 percent of Tongan, Samoan, and Niue adults had received some form of assistance and 38 percent of adult Cook Islands people had done so. In some instances PIECCs themselves become centres for parents where staff and management have provided them with support and information. This information is not restricted only to the education of their children but extends to their children's wider developmental needs and possible access to other social services.

It is against this background that progress towards full implementation of Te Whāriki and the provision of professional development aimed at this process needs to be placed.

Professional Development in PIECCs for the Implementation of Te Whāriki

The focus groups all reported favourably on the professional development they had received from ECD to date for the following reasons: their use of the process of needs analysis; the delivery in the Pacific languages by Pacific Islands facilitators; the relevance and cultural appropriateness of support and advice; and the use of cluster group approaches to professional development.

The two main sources of frustration for staff at many centres, however, were that staffing commitments usually prevented simultaneous access by all staff at a centre to the professional development provided, and that there was not enough time for some continuing relationship and support that could be provided by the ECD facilitators within the present contract.

The advisory committee also raised the issues of timing of the professional development, although acknowledging that any curriculum document, once "official" and required to be implemented, must be accompanied by some level of professional support and development. In respect of PIECCs, however, both the advisory committee and a number of focus group members noted that any mention of particular outcomes for "Tangata Pasifika" had been removed from the final Te Whāriki document. There may have been some initial period of working out by centres and associations exactly where and how PIECCs "fitted", and that is why a number of centres and training providers still refer to the draft document of 1993 for some key starting points.

An evaluation of the provision of early childhood professional development programmes to support curriculum implementation was completed by Michael Gaffney and Anne Smith in February 1997. Their emphasis on the importance of outcomes for children has already been mentioned in this report. Gaffney and Smith (1997) also outline some contextual features of

professional development that lead to success or failure, which are relevant to this study. They develop these contextual features under the following headings: participant characteristics, group composition characteristics, centre characteristics, and parent/community characteristics.

Gaffney and Smith describe participant characteristics which affect professional development input including personal factors unrelated to the job such as family commitments, lack of time, travel, and isolation. Other personal factors which are related to the job include attitudes, motivation, existing training, and the depth of theoretical understanding and familiarity with Te Whāriki. There was also an awareness that some participants will not be affected or changed by professional development because they believe they are "doing it already" that is, implementing Te Whāriki. These were also factors referred to by the focus groups and the advisory committee in the present study.

In terms of group composition in the delivery of professional development, Gaffney and Smith (1997) write that in any given centre the proportion of staff involved is very important:

> A critical mass of people among a centre staff is needed in order to sustain professional development programs, and to allow them to be effectively implemented. . . . Clearly the more comprehensive the participation of centres, the more successful the program is likely to be. (p. 83)

There also exists the possibility of tensions when some staff receive professional development and some are left out. The focus groups reported concern where not all staff have access to professional development. Centres also like the cluster approach used by ECD.

Gaffney and Smith found that "mixed groups" across services were both liked and disliked: sometimes it was good to be together to share common needs, at other times it was good to be just with other colleagues from the same service (or background). A range of skills and backgrounds of participants provided a challenge for the facilitators in their study, and in the focus groups members mentioned differences in training backgrounds as important in determining current and future needs in achieving agreement in the implementation of Te Whāriki.

The important centre characteristics described by Gaffney and Smith are the need for a stable, settled staff and access to relievers so that release time can be arranged, the nature of resources and financial support available to staff, and "the quality of existing centre practice". Centres have to be committed as a whole, they say, if positive change is to be achieved, and centres need to have "opted" into a programme rather than be "pressured" to participate. The previous comments from focus groups about levels of resourcing, the availability of financial support in PIECCS, access to release time, and suitably qualified relievers are pertinent here in terms of whether professional development will ultimately be successful in PIECCs.

And lastly, Gaffney and Smith looked at parent/community characteristics. They suggest that where parents were informed, enthusiastic, and supportive about professional development programmes that the staff were involved in, staff felt such programmes were the most successful. It meant too, that parents were responsive to the changes made by staff in a number of areas, as a result of their professional development. The challenges faced by staff of PIECCs when they attempt to inform and involve parents whose cultures and languages are other than English have already been mentioned.

Finally, in their summary Gaffney and Smith referred to the importance of relationships not only with the curriculum facilitators, but also amongst and between colleagues as they create

together collegiality, mutual trust, partnership, and collaboration. The timeframes needed (longer than one year they suggest) for these relationships to develop are very important. In the focus groups it was evident that the ECD facilitators and the centres with which they were then working were developing relationships of trust and sharing, which are likely prerequisites for positive change. In the light of the evaluation by Gaffney and Smith, the plea from centres for more time with their facilitator would seem to be valid, to enable them to build their relationship with their facilitator.

Implementing Te Whāriki

Findings from the focus groups, and comments from the advisory committee, centre upon the present terms and the languages (English and Māori) of the Te Whāriki document. The challenges are already being addressed in some part by work of the Pacific Islands national early childhood associations and some training providers to translate the document so that it is relevant and accessible to their particular parents and communities. However, the national associations (unless they have won contracts with the Ministry of Education or have received some form of assistance from agencies) are struggling within the limitations of their own resources to develop an appropriate and relevant curriculum document for their particular ethnic group that lies within the parameters of Te Whāriki. The development of the Tongan document, for example, by Utu Lelei, has involved not only a translation of terms, but also the addition of principles which reflect the priorities, values, philosophy, and definitions of learning and teaching derived from Tongan culture. ECD facilitators in the focus groups mentioned the importance of translation and an ability to communicate in at least one Pacific language as an important starting point when working with centres. Further, where Te Whāriki has been translated, either by the training provider which trained the staff, or by the national association giving leadership in this area, working with PIECCs proceeded more easily.

The linguistic imperative and justification for early childhood immersion programmes in the various Pacific languages can be seen in the 1996 statistics (Statistics New Zealand, 1998) where levels of fluency (defined as ability to hold a conversation about everyday things in that Pacific language) are described. The figures for levels of "fluency", as defined, are 20 percent Cook Islands Māori, 34 percent for the Niue language, 63 percent for Tongan, and 68 percent for Samoan. The relatively low percentages for the Niue and Cook Islands Māori languages may suggest a need to focus on the maintenance and revival of these two language groups.

An additional challenge for ā'oga 'āmata included implementing *Ta'iala*. The centres which have been part of a Ministry of Education professional development contract have received support for this task from trained and qualified Samoan facilitators who are, most importantly, fluent speakers. Centre representatives participating in the focus groups mentioned their initial confusion between the two documents but reported that most concerns have now been worked through. Burgess (1998) has documented the process of integrating both documents in her case studies of two centres. She traced how the two documents are blended as two teachers interleaved planning and action across a range of activities in developing the centre's curriculum. Burgess has detailed the nature of the plans they made, the planning methods they used, and the features of the environment within which planning took place. A particular feature of this study is that Burgess recorded the actual dialogue of the teachers as they reflected on children's behaviour and

their provision, and as they engaged in planning for the following days. She has identified some constraining factors to planning and traced the starting points as the teachers planned from the two documents. A close, focused study such as this should be replicated and extended because it would yield further and more detailed evidence to guide future professional development provision. Professional development for staff in PIECCs should continue to be not only cost-effective but also relevant, timely, and appropriate to the needs of PIECCs as they implement both Te Whāriki and *Ta'ıala*. Burgess's work also gives timely suggestions of areas of future research in this area.

The Relationship Between Professional Development and Action Research

The purpose of the present study was not only to gather information about present provisions of professional development for representatives from PIECCs in the implementation of Te Whāriki, and to document what PIECCs are doing currently in relation to assessment and evaluation, but also to gauge support for a proposal for a subsequent action research phase. The focus groups, having been introduced to the processes and findings of Carr (1998) and Podmore and May, with Mara (1998), were asked to give their views about a possible action research project in PIECCs, and to share ideas about how such an action research phase might be carried out. The ideas are recorded in the results section of this report and, taken together, give some clear guidelines to a possible future research project. However, it is necessary to restate the rationale behind why an action research phase was suggested. There is a relationship between professional development in the implementation of Te Whāriki and the use of action research as a tool for centres to develop self-assessment and evaluation approaches. The rationale for using an action research approach is outlined by Podmore and May, with Mara (1998). Evidence from Rodd (1994) shows that action research enhances professional learning and fosters reflective practice. Carr and Kemmis (1996, cited in Podmore and May, with Mara, 1998) stress two goals of action research as being improvement and involvement. And further, as Oja and Smulyan (1989) state:

> In collaborative action research, 'improved practice results from practitioner participation in the investigation of actions and issues of immediate importance'. (p.1)

There may be potentially close similarities between early childhood educators as "reflective practitioners" and early childhood educators as researchers because teaching and learning require educators to be observing, planning, acting, reflecting, and making judgments every moment of their day, with each and every child. The systematic recording of observed behaviour, relationships, and interactions with others and the centre environment is, in effect, the collection of evidence to demonstrate outcomes for children. In broad terms, documentation of such evidence should be as useful to the practitioner as it is to the researcher, although different uses may eventually be made of that information. Staff at centres have to be accountable to the children they teach and to their parents through the collection and sharing of information, including observations, so that progress for a child, in a whole range of skills and abilities, is clearly demonstrated.

Future Training and Professional Development Provision

Examples in the focus groups and discussion in the advisory committee tend to support continuing and extending a needs-analysis approach with PIECCs as the most effective way to proceed in the provision of professional development. Such an approach can take into account the diversity of PIECCs and the variability of needs across centres making any continuing professional development more specific, responsive, and appropriate to each centre.

A needs-analysis approach is also supported in the evaluation report of training for boards of trustees by Gilmore, MacGibbon, and Besley (1998) as an important procedure to be used prior to any training. Although their report looks at training and "professional development" of members of school boards of trustees, a number of the implications of their findings to future training have relevance here. Gilmore et al. suggest that all trainers should be skilled and knowledgeable, including, if possible, local trainers or trainers with recent experience in serving with boards. Facilitators for PIECCs have to be fluent in the language of the centres they are working with as well as being experienced in early childhood development and learning. A thorough knowledge of Te Whāriki is also required.

Gilmore et al. also include making training "practical and responsive", including being responsive in terms of timing (that is, times to be flexible to suit the participants, timely to meet present needs, and provided within the first year of being elected). Information from the focus groups in this study suggests that, for PIECCs, all of these factors are important, particularly centres being given support through their first year of operation to implement Te Whāriki.

A further point made by Gilmore et al. was the need for some continuity. Participants in training need to know that present provisions are not just a "one-off"—that there will be some form of continuing training. Similarly, representatives from PIECCs in this study expressed the desire for some follow-up beyond the present provision.

Future Research and a Proposed Action Research Phase in PIECCs

The links between professional development and research have already been demonstrated. The participants in the focus groups were all informed by the invited consultants of the rationale, design, and planning of the action research phase (Carr, May, & Podmore, 1998a & b). Links between the projects in kindergartens, playcentres, and childcare and the proposed action research project in PIECCs that were forged in the focus groups were positively and unanimously received. The focus groups, however, did specify some conditions and important variations on the basic process and development. These are specified in the Results section of the report.

However, in line with Gaffney and Smith (1997), Gilmore et al. (1998), and the discussions in the focus groups and the advisory committee, any future action research project would need to take account of a number of significant factors. Firstly, some staff at PIECCs may need further preparation in terms of having greater familiarity and ease with Te Whāriki—not only with the document as it stands, but also with the developments which have occurred in translation and in adapting the framework to suit the aims and philosophy of the different Pacific ethnic groups. National associations and training providers report that such developments are still in train. These include working towards a level of consistency of terms and concepts.

Secondly, in order to trial an assessment and evaluation framework using Te Whāriki, there

is a need for greater familiarity with the learning and teaching stories approach. Members of all the focus groups understood this approach. However, it is unlikely they would have had "practice" with learning and teaching stories when collecting and interpreting their observations.

Thirdly, any future action research in PIECCs would need to be based upon a level of knowledge and understanding of the action research method, and a commitment to trialling this, in order for it to have better outcomes for the quality of provision and outcomes for Pacific children and their families.

Lastly, it is important that practitioners have an opportunity to plan, reflect, and implement change, which is integral to an action research approach. A significant difference when working with PIECCs is the need for all those taking part in the action research to operate fully bilingually, in English and the relevant Pacific language.

Continuing Issues

The advisory committee was supportive of, and endorsed, these issues that were articulated in the focus groups:

- the challenges of working with parents and the communities with limited resources;
- the challenges of adapting Te Whāriki and making it their "own" (Pacific) document;
- the need for continuing provision of professional development to PIECCs that is accessible, timely, and addresses the needs of staff, centres, and Pacific children and their families.

Further, the committee wanted recorded the following issues that still require attention for the effective implementation of Te Whāriki and future research and development:

- Pacific Islands early childhood educators need to document their own processes of implementation on their own terms.
- There are substantive resource implications, in terms of language maintenance, for the implementation of Te Whāriki in PIECCs to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of Pacific Islands children.
- There is still a lack of material (and other) resources to implement both Te Whāriki and *Ta'ıala*.
- Implementing Te Whāriki requires a closer relationship between theory and practice; in terms of theory, Pacific Islands early childhood teachers need to "move on" from a Piagetian approach (ages and stages) towards the theories of Vygotsky and Bruner (for further discussion of Vygotsky's theory in relation to Te Whāriki *see* Smith, 1996).
- The thematic approach can be limiting if it is not related to the strands of Te Whāriki. In addition, the strategies of observation, reflection, and assessment and evaluation are all required to demonstrate learning outcomes for children.
- There is a great need for more research on a "Pacific" pedagogy, through participatory action research on learning— "the more we work with Te Whāriki, the more we will understand and the more understandable it will be for our parents/families".

- There is a need for more in-depth research on the kinds and nature of professional development for staff in PIECCs in order to support greater and more effective coverage in the future.

SUMMARY

In summary, the information gathered from the representatives of centres which participated in the focus groups was mainly, but not exclusively, about day-to-day, operational issues. The issues raised by the advisory committee, and findings in the current literature, support the findings from the focus groups. Taken together, these sources of data provide a more comprehensive picture of the issues. The following summary statements can therefore be made regarding Te Whāriki in PIECCs, professional development provision, and future action research.

- **Te Whāriki**

Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum document was published in 1996 as a bicultural document. Te Whāriki, when interpreted in a culturally and linguistically appropriate context for PIECCs, becomes not simply a set of translations. It represents "new territories" in programmes and provisions for Pacific Islands children and their families. Concern was expressed by some members of the advisory committee regarding the "lack" of a theoretical base to underpin each ethnic group's interpretation of Te Whāriki. Much needs to be done as each ethnic group goes through the necessary processes to articulate this base. The progress to date of the national Tongan early childhood association, Utu Lelei, goes a long way to address the need for a sound theoretical base which is grounded in an appropriate cultural context. All subsequent professional development and proposed research should take these important differences into account.

- **Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres**

Staff in PIECCs require professional development which is timely, appropriate, and based on the unique needs of each centre. Effective professional development in the implementation of Te Whāriki is based on knowledge of and ease with the Te Whāriki document (as it relates to Pacific families and children), and the ability of the staff as a whole to access centre-based and cluster-based approaches. Taking the recommendation by Gilmore et al. (1998) for boards of trustees, as it may apply to PIECCs, it seems to be crucial to provide some form of ongoing advisory support, particularly in the first year of a centre's operation.

- **Action Research Project**

An action research project is favoured and endorsed by the participants in the six focus groups in this study, provided it is carried out using Pacific aims, methodology, and approaches to meet the current needs of PIECCs. The focus groups and the advisory committee have provided some very clear guidelines for an action research project, should the opportunity, funding, and expertise be available and only if they could all be brought together for such a project.

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APPENDIX I

Focus Group Agenda (sample)

IMPLEMENTATION OF TE WHĀRIKI IN PACIFIC ISLANDS EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES

Focus Group Six
Thursday 6 August 1998
ECD Riccarton, Otautahi/Christchurch

Opening Prayer
Introductions

Apologies

Introduction to the process (Diane)

Question 1: Update from all participants about current provisions, professional development programmes, and the implementation of Te Whāriki in centres.

(Morning Tea) 10:30 am

Continue Question 1

Input: Update on current research on assessment and evaluation: May, Podmore, Carr, and Mara.

(Dr Val Podmore)

(Lunch) 12:30 pm

Continue input.

Question 2: Proposal for an action research project on assessment and evaluation in PIECCs.

Responses to presentation
Particular needs of PIECCs for action research
Working with centres
Possible outcomes
Any other matters

Closing Prayer at/by 4pm

APPENDIX II

List of Pacific Islands Early Childhood Centres Participating in the Focus Groups

We thank the staff and management of the thirty centres which took part in the focus groups. The following gave us permission to publish their names:

Akoteu Tokaima'anga Pre School Otara

Atuhau Tupukake, Mt Roskill, Auckland

St Lukes Pacific Island Language Centre Tokoroa

Te Ara Metua Punanga Reo Kuki Airani Inc Tokoroa

Ā'oga Fa'a Samoa (Inc) Ponsonby

Ā'oga 'āmata Aotearoa Christchurch

Mapusaga Ā'oga 'āmata Christchurch

Ā'oga 'āmata Preschool Invercargill

Ra-itu Koanga Reo Pacific Islands Language Group Tokoroa

Te Punanga o te Reo Hamilton

Ā'oga 'āmata EFKS Newtown

Ā'oga 'āmata: PIPC Newtown

Ā'oga 'āmata Strathmore